

Choosing Child Care



Department of Social Services
Child Care Services

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Choosing child care is one of the most important jobs of being a parent. It can be one of the most frustrating and challenging decisions you will make. As a parent, you are the main influence in your children's lives, but the provider you choose will also have a major impact.

How do you know your children are being well cared for? How do you find the right place for your children – a place where they can learn and grow?

This booklet is designed to be used as a tool to make the search a little easier. The color-code is designed to assist you in determining the quality of child care. As you answer the questions, check the box that best describes the child care situation you are considering. When making your decision, look at the checked boxes as you would a stop light.



Green: Go

Yellow: Caution

Red: Stop

A majority of green boxes checked indicates that a program has met minimal standards of quality. Most sites will have a combination of green and yellow boxes. If there is a majority of red boxes, you may want to visit some other sites before making a decision.



Getting Started: Check All Available Resources

- Determine the types of child care available.
- Check with the Office of Child Care Services for inspection reports for registered or licensed providers.
- Contact your area Early Childhood Enrichment program or an established child care referral service.
- Check local advertisements or yellow pages.
- Talk to others whose opinions you respect.



Call the Provider to Schedule a Telephone Interview

Name of Provider: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Address: _____

Is this a convenient time to visit, if not
when can I call you back? _____

How many children are cared for?

What are your fees? _____

What hours are you open? _____

What days are you open? _____

Are you open year round? _____

Do you have openings? If not, do you anticipate having any in the future?

Do you have a waiting list? _____

Are you registered or licensed?

☐

Yes

☐

No

What training do you have?

☐

Bachelors or Masters Degree in
Early Childhood or Early
Elementary Education

☐

Associate Degree in Early
Childhood

☐

Child Development Associate
Certificate (CDA)

- ☐ College credits in early childhood or school-age education
- ☐ Supervised work experience in childcare or preschool setting or early elementary classroom
- ☐ At least 6 training hours in areas relating to care of children
- ☐ Infant-Child CPR
- ☐ First Aid
- ☐ None

How long have you been in the profession?

- ☐ 5 years or more
- ☐ 1 to 4 years
- ☐ Less than 1 year

How long do you plan to continue this profession?

- ☐ This is my career
- ☐ Not sure

Can you provide two references from parents of children in the program now or in the past? If the provider is just starting their childcare business, ask for references from past employers.

1. _____

Telephone Number _____

2. _____

Telephone Number _____



Call References

- ☐ Yes, go.
☐ No, stop.

☐ Were you satisfied with the group size and number of adults available to care for the children?

☐ Were you satisfied with the quality of care given?

☐ Were you satisfied with the meals and snacks?

☐ Were you satisfied with the activities planned for the children?

☐ Were you satisfied with the type of discipline used?

☐ Were you satisfied with the overall management of the program (i.e. policies, hours of operation, staff)?

How long did you or have you used this program? _____

What do you feel were the programs strengths and weaknesses? _____

Would you choose this program again? Why or Why not? _____



Set an Appointment to Visit the Child Care Program Site

Site Visit -- Date and Time _____

Group Size and Staff to Child Ratio

According to the National Research Council, staff to child ratio and group size are two of the most important areas to be addressed in standards for care. In general, children do better in smaller groups. And the younger the child, the more critical it is to have a low staff to child ratio.

Use the following two charts to compare the group size and staff to child ratio of the child care program site you are considering.

Group Size

Age	National Recommended Group Size	South Dakota Group Size *
0 - 12 Months	6	20
1 - 2 Years	8 - 10	20
3 Years	14	20
4 and 5 Years	16	20
6 Years & Older	20 - 24	20 **

Staff to Child Ratio

Age	National Recommended Staff to Child Ratio	South Dakota Staff to Child Ratio *
0 - 12 Months	1:3	1:5
1 - 2 Years	1:4 - 1:5	1:5
3 Years	1:7	1:10
4 and 5 Years	1:8	1:10
6 Years & Older	1:10 - 1:12	1:15




* SD Registered Family Day Care Homes:
One adult can care for up to 12 children without assistance. Of the 12 children, no more than four children can be under two years of age and no more than two of those four children can be under one year of age.

** Licensed Before and After School Centers may have larger group sizes based on their licensed capacity but must maintain the established staff to child ratio.






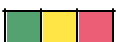



Environment and Caregiver Actions

The environment should above all else be safe. Check for things such as appropriate toys and activities for the age range of children, nutritious meals, cleanliness, and a range of activities indoors and outdoors. Check for amount and type of interactions between the caregiver and the children.

You can look for the following items in the physical space and caregiver actions.

-  Meets All Criteria
-  Meets Some Criteria
-  Meets None of the Criteria

Infants and Toddlers

-  There is a clean area for crawling and exploring.
-  Toys are clean and free from rough edges.
-  Open stairways are blocked off by gates.
-  Children spend the majority of waking time out of cribs, high chairs, swings, play pens, etc.
-  There is enough age-appropriate equipment and materials for all children.
-  Music is played at a soft, comforting volume appropriate for infants and toddlers.
-  Staff hold babies when bottle feeding.
-  Staff hold, talk to and play with babies other than at feeding times.
-  Staff are situated near infants and toddlers to supervise and attend to their needs.

Preschoolers



Home or center is neat, clean and organized.



There is enough space and bedding for children to nap.



Rooms are cheerful, attractive and appealing to children.



Music is played at a soft volume and appropriate for children.



Television use is limited and appropriate for children.



Materials and toys are situated so children can reach them without adult assistance.



Accommodations are made with materials and equipment for children with special needs.



There is enough age-appropriate equipment and materials for all children.



Toys are in good repair with no rough edges.



Staff engage in conversation and interaction with all children.



Staff are situated as needed to supervise and assist children.



The outdoor play area is safe and staff are spread out to supervise activities.

School Age



The physical space is cheerful and temperature is comfortable.



Space is separated for different types of activities and allows enough room for children.



Children have chances to work individually and in groups.



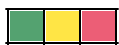
Activities, equipment and materials are age-appropriate and encourage participation in positive learning experiences.



Accommodations are made with materials and equipment for children with special needs.



Staff engage in conversation and interaction with all children.



Staff are situated as needed to supervise and assist children.



Supplies and materials are accessible to children without requiring adult assistance.

Meals

Children are offered a nutritious:



breakfast



morning snack



lunch



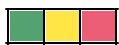
afternoon snack



dinner



evening snack



The childcare provider is on the Federal Food Program.



Menus are posted.

Other Caregiver Aspects



Is warm, friendly and responsive to children.



Is energetic, in good health and able to keep up with children.



Provides age-appropriate routine and rules that are easily understood by the children.



Allows parents to visit unannounced at any time during the day.



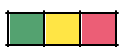
Has a sense of humor.



Enjoys working with children at all different age levels.



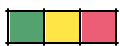
Is caring, understanding and sets a positive example.



Washes hands frequently, especially after changing diapers.



Is accepting of a child's normal developmental behavior such as wetting, soiling, thumbsucking.



Encourages children to express themselves verbally by listening to the children, talking to them and asking them questions.



Encourages infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children to try new activities and master skills.

Administrative Questions

- What is your policy on discipline?
- Where are the fire exits located?
- Are meals included in the fee or are they extra?
- If my child needs transportation to or from preschool, kindergarten or school, do you provide that? Is there an extra cost?
- Do you have a program handbook that describes rules, fees and policies of your program?
- Do I pay when my children are not here because of illness or vacation?
- Do I pay when you are ill or on vacation?
- What happens if my child gets sick? If you get sick?



More Information on Child Care Options

For more Information regarding child care options you can contact the Child Care Services (CCS) licensing office or the Early Childhood Enrichment (ECE) program in your area.

Rapid City Area:

CCS Licensing at: (605) 355-3545 or the ECE Office of Early Childhood Connections at: (605) 342-6464 or 1-888-999-7759

Pierre Area:

CCS Licensing at: (605) 773-4766 or 1-800-227-3020 (press 0) or the Pierre Area Referral Service ECE at: (605) 224-8731 or 1-800-499-4767

Aberdeen Area:

CCS Licensing at: (605) 626-2340 or the ECE Office of Early Childhood Partners at: (605) 229-8505 or 1-800-982-6404

Brookings Area:

CCS Licensing at: (605) 688-4334 or the ECE Office of Brookings Family Resource Network at: (605) 688-5730 or 1-800-354-8238

Sioux Falls Area:

CCS Licensing at: (605) 367-7602 or the ECE Office of Sioux Valley C.H.I.L.D. Services at: (605) 333-0663 or 1-800-235-5923 (4)

Mitchell Area:

CCS Licensing at: (605) 995-8000 or the ECE Office of Sioux Valley C.H.I.L.D. Services, Sioux Falls at: (605) 333-0663 or 1-800-235-5923 (4)

Yankton Area:

CCS Licensing at: (605) 668-3030 or the ECE Office of Sioux Valley C.H.I.L.D. Services, Sioux Falls at: (605) 333-0663 or 1-800-235-5923 (4)

Visit Us on the Web at:

**[www.state.sd.us/
social/ccs/ccshome.htm](http://www.state.sd.us/social/ccs/ccshome.htm)**



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